

Baker, M. K., Graham, J. A., Smith, A., & Smith, Z. T. (2019). Sport-Specific Free Play Youth Football/Soccer Program Recommendations around the World. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 6(2), 234-243.

What is it about? (Aim/objectives)

Analysing coaching and play manuals of national federations for young (U/11 age) football players to determine the role of free play and fun for life-long participation and optimal learning.

Where is it from? (Context/location)

Manuals, learning materials and on-line sources from 11 countries – Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, Germany, Italy, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, USA and Wales.

Who are involved? (Research participants)

Training manuals and materials.

What are the readings and main concepts?

Programmes, philosophical approaches, and delivery tips for offering meaningful soccer and related-games to young children in the foundation phase of learning fundamental sport and life skills.

What are the main findings? (Results)

All countries and federations emphasize the importance of approaches (excluding England that focus on competitive sport and coaching for excellence):

- Learning and mastering sport-related skills in a fun way.
- Learning by playing many challenging adapted games and activities.
- Ensure a high level of physical activity – more balls, each player to be active and get many opportunities to practice and play.
- Adapt games to ensure children are creative, use their imagination and enjoy competing without emphasising winning – it is about playing and enjoyment, not scoring.
- Player-centred – let children take decisions and adapt rules to make play fair and fun.
- Ensure safety and without the stress of competition or pressure from coaches and parents.
- Provide station-based learning for small groups and small-group (4 or 5-a side) games.
- Ensure progression for motor skills and for life skills.

What are the main lessons? (Discussion/Reflections/Learnings)

Philosophical approaches found in the international documents and on-line manuals:

- i) Encouraging sport-specific free play for enjoyment and long-term involvement in sport and healthy living.
- ii) Use sport-specific free play for learning sport skills, but also for life skills and values like respect, being brave, having confidence, good communication, sharing and caring.
- iii) Embracing fun games that are adapted and pose many challenges

Development *through* sport and *in* sport is about providing sport-related and games experiences for young children, it is about mastery of sport-related (soccer) skills in a fun way with high levels of activity and learning by playing.

Is it useful? (Chat room, knowledge sharing)

When you offer sport-related programmes and experiences to young (U/11) children, how do you go about making sure they are having fun, engage in free play and learn life skills? Answer by considering the following:

- What is the role of the coach/volunteer/presenter?
- How do you choose and deliver your activities?
- How do you measure success?

Do you think NGOs can play a role to introduce young children to learn the fundamentals in sport and facilitate the learning of life skills in a fun way? If yes, what good practices can you share?